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Working
Together

Ecumenical
Lectures

Interreligious
Cooperation

Working with the
Differently Abled

NCC Korea

Volume 38 • Number 2 • June 2003

Working Together



Sawai Chinnawong (Thailand):
Pentecost

*Pentecost is a good reminder
of how the Spirit can
empower us to do things that
may seem impossible—
including understanding one
another despite the many
differences we have. May the
Spirit of God equip us to
work together!*

This June issue of *CCA News* carries the theme 'Working Together' to affirm the need for all peoples of Asia, regardless of faith, colour, language, culture, economic status or educational attainment, to work together. The realities of Asia are such that no one group or community can exist by itself or solve the emerging problems and challenges alone. Instead, we all have to work together as partners and neighbours, sharing this region called Asia.

Among the emerging challenges and realities in Asia is the volatile state of peace and security in the region, due to ongoing conflicts and unresolved tensions for socio-economic and religious-political reasons. Added to this is the threat of war, brought about by the hegemonic power controlling the world today.

Asia's fluctuating economy has also been hard hit, not only by the economic crisis that has not altogether abated, but also by the recent outbreak of the new coronavirus epidemic that has almost crippled a number of thriving Asian cities.

We need to work together if we are to live together. Working together requires having common goals and a common vision of a life together. Working together means coming to terms with our misunderstandings, our conflicts, our intolerance, in order to strengthen our commitment to building communities of peace for all.

During the past quarter, CCA was able to organise, in conjunction with other groups, programs towards this end. The interfaith consultation brought together representatives from major religious communities. The program with the differently abled was a wake-up call to our need to work with those with disabilities and different abilities. The meeting on tourism for peace and justice offers new possibilities for putting a more humane face to tourism.

Even the stories of member churches and councils about their new resolve to be truly ecumenical rather than simply denominational echo the call of the hour: to work together to bring about fullness of life for all.

The month of June is also significant because of various observances. Asia Sunday falls on 1 June this year and the theme, 'For We Are Neighbours', echoes that need to learn to work and live together. Environment Sunday, which can be any Sunday closest to the World Environment Day, 5 June, is definitely a call to learn to live and work with God's creation as good stewards. Liturgically, 8 June is Pentecost Sunday, which is a good reminder of how the Spirit can empower us to do things that may seem so impossible—including understanding one another despite the many differences we have.

May the Spirit of God equip us to work together!

—Abn Jae Woong

PS. On behalf of the staff and officers of the Christian Conference of Asia, I would like to thank the member churches, ecumenical partners and friends who have expressed their sincere concern for us during the outbreak of the atypical pneumonia or severe acute respiratory syndrome. The impact of the epidemic was such that we had to cancel or postpone a number of our programs. Let us continue to pray for those who are still suffering from the disease, and all those who have been affected one way or the other.

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Towards Innovative Methods in Theological Education

CCA-MIT-ATEM Lectures

To celebrate the diamond jubilee of the Myanmar Institute of Theology (MIT), a series of lectures was presented by visiting theologians and educators on the theme 'Innovative Methods in Theological Education' on 6–7 March 2003 at the MIT Diamond Jubilee Building at Seminary Hill in Insein, Yangon.

Jointly sponsored by MIT, the Association of Theological Education in Myanmar (ATEM), and the Christian Conference of Asia, the lectures were attended by teachers, students and staff of MIT and other ATEM member institutions.

MIT had humble beginnings, starting with only four students in 1927. Now it has an enrolment of 769 students, much less than the number of applicants. When it began MIT was run by international missionaries, but since 1966 it has been run and staffed entirely by nationals. MIT serves around twenty-three ethnic groups in the country and is affiliated with the Baptist, Presbyterian, Anglican, Methodist, Lutheran and other Protestant groups. Isn't that a uniquely and naturally ecumenical seminary, both ethnically and denominationally speaking?

ATEM is a network of theological schools in Myanmar working to upgrade theological education and promote unity, partnership, cooperation and collaboration. Among its aims are to strengthen theological institutions, develop and promote higher theological education and promote theology for Myanmar.

Following is a summary of highlights from the lectures. The full lectures will be published in 'CTC Bulletin' later this year.

Theological Education as Education for Life

The first lecture was by Dr Hope S. Antone, CCA communication consultant, on 'Reclaiming Theological Education as Education for Life: Towards Innovative Methods in Theological Education'.

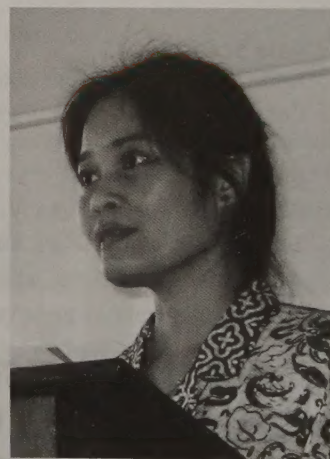
'If theology is the study about God, with God, and towards God, and since God is the source of and reason for life, then theological education should be holistic education for life,' Hope Antone said. Disagreeing that seminarians' years in theological education are 'hidden years' mastering the seminary curriculum, she says theological education is a special opportunity for seminarians to 'sharpen their faith commitments, clarify their life's engagements and broaden their perspectives'.

She added that theological education helps seminarians integrate faith issues and life issues and enables them to critique what is death-dealing and affirm what is life-giving. It also helps them see the interconnections of life and their interconnections with each other and the rest of God's world, and equips them for their responsibility of claiming and proclaiming God's will for fullness of life for all that they may enable and equip others to do the same.

Commenting that while many Christians claim that the Bible is the book of life, feminists have shown that 'we cannot just make

such a claim without clarifying how and why the Bible has in fact been used to deny life to some people, especially women and those outside the chosen race'.

Likewise, while there are also Christians who claim that Jesus is the answer to any question, experience and common sense tell us that 'we cannot just make such a claim about Jesus without knowing what the questions and needs of the people are'. Theological education as education for life involves critical approaches to learning so that students/learners can critically appropriate the tools of theologising for the purpose of proclaiming fullness of life to all people. Sharing the results of a survey she conducted of theological institutions in Asia, Hope said that theo-



Dr Hope S. Antone

logical education in Asia reflects a variety of mission orientations, generally follows the Western 'specialist approach', and puts more emphasis on cognitive or intellectual development to the neglect of other aspects of human development.

In order to make methods more innovative, she suggested some principles to help shape the planning of innovative ways.

First, there is a need to clarify the mission orientation of theological institutions—do they affirm the uniqueness of each denomination or ethnic group and at the same time foster an open ecumenical spirit, not only among Christian denominations but also with the other faiths in Asia?

Second, there is a need to think of and re-claim theological education as holistic education. The need in the field is for church ministers, leaders and educators who are general practitioners—well trained in all disciplines and equipped in all areas.

Third, there is a need to relate with students as whole persons, with minds, bodies and emotions. Hence, teaching should also affect the whole being of students, not just the intellect.

Fourth, there is a need for faculty and students to learn from feminist praxis—which is based on experience, critique and advocacy for transformation. (More of this was shared in her second lecture.)

Innovative Counselling and Pastoral Care

The second lecture was given by the Rev. Dr Chuleepran Srisoontorn-Persons, professor of counselling at the McGilvary Faculty of Theology in Payap University, Chiang Mai, Thailand.

Chuleepran shared some of her experiences of learning from and working with people with HIV/AIDS using the community-based approach. In view of the stigmatisation that people with HIV/AIDS get from the wider society, hard lessons have been learned by members of rural communities who had to turn to each other for support and solidarity.

She narrated several real-life stories of Buddhist and Christian communities coming together to help provide care and support for people living with HIV/AIDS and their families. Before, these communities lived their own ways. Now, they have learned to live together. 'This innovative way of counselling and care has brought us more closely together despite our differences.' Citing the cases of the death of a pastor who was previously Buddhist and a Bud-

dhist monk who was previously Christian, both due to HIV/AIDS, she said even planning and celebrating a funeral must also be community oriented.

'With each of the deceased having family members and friends from two faith communities, how should the funeral be conducted?' she asked. The religious rituals and funeral services could not just be done in the usual manner if this diversity of faith traditions was to be considered. So it is quite common to see Buddhists, in-

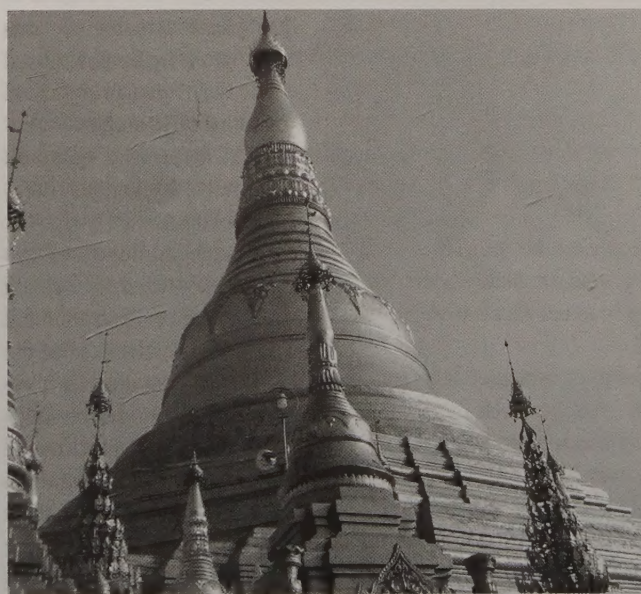


Rev. Dr Chuleepran Srisoontorn-Persons



Ahn Jae Woong, CCA general secretary, and Smith N. Za Thawng, Myanmar Council of Churches general secretary in a visit to MIT in February 2003

Yangon's Shwedagon Pagoda

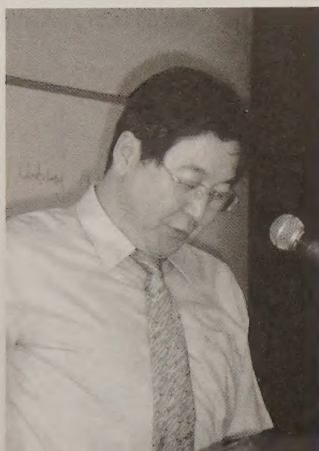


cluding monks, attend funeral services in the church and Christians, including clergy, attending funeral rites in the temple.

Working closely with people such as sex workers has also challenged church workers to rethink their theology, which traditionally has been moralistic.

In conclusion, Chuleepran challenged the audience of theological faculty members and students in Myanmar to learn from and work closely with the marginalised people in their communities, including those who are infected with the HIV/AIDS virus. In doing so, a lot of innovative ways of doing things would surely emerge.

Welcoming the Yin Christ



Dr Heup Young Kim

Christotao might overcome the present dualism between christology and christopraxis.

He explained Tao as referring to the ultimate reality beyond the realm of naming. It is 'great in all things, complete in all, universal in all, whole in all'.

The third lecture was given by Dr Heup Young Kim, theology professor at Kangnam University in Korea, who spoke on 'The Coming of Yin Christ: Jesus Christ as the Tao.'

Dr Heup Young Kim situated the present christological crisis as consisting of two problems: modern historicism and dualism in Western thought between logos and praxis.

Offering the Tao as an alternative root-metaphor for Jesus Christ, he suggested that

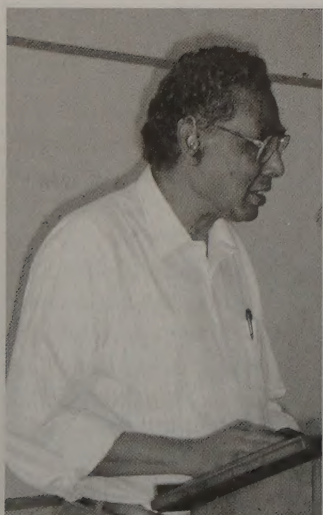
He pointed out that the Tao Te Ching described Tao with basically feminine metaphors, including 'the mystical female' and her 'actionless activity', which is the essence of the feminine. He quoted Bede Griffiths as saying, 'The world today needs to recover this sense of feminine power, which is complementary to the masculine and without which man becomes dominating, sterile and destructive. But this means that Western religion must come to recognise the feminine aspect of God.'

Calling for a great reversal of the Tao, from yang to yin, he declared that the period of the yin Christ is waxing. As the yang has reached its maximum intensity, it is time to revert to yin. For centuries, the Western world followed the path of the yang—aggressive, rational, scientific, thereby bringing the world near destruction. It is time to recover the path of the yin, the feminine, which is passive, patient, intuitive and poetic.

He added that the white androcentric logos christologies of the yang Christ, which are masculine, expansive, demanding, aggressive, competitive, rational, analytic, need to be discarded. Instead, it is time for the yin christologies which are feminine, contractive, conservative, responsive, cooperative, intuitive, synthesising.

(More on this topic will be available in a forthcoming book by Dr Heup Young Kim, *Christ and the Tao*.)

Innovative Methods in Theological Education



Dr Dyanchand Carr

The fourth lecture was given by Dr Dyanchand Carr, then principal of Tamilnadu Theological Seminary in India, who spoke on 'Innovative Methods in Theological Education'.

Dyanchand described two approaches used in training pastors. One is the traditional approach, which he called the 'Noah's Ark' model, as it assumes that the church comprises people plucked out of the evil world who need to be kept undefiled to enter their heavenly abode. In this model, the pastor's role is to help

people get on board after a filtering process. He also calls this the training for 'maintenance ministry', i.e. to keep things going as they have always gone.

The second approach is the missiological approach, whose task is to train pastors to 'equip the whole congregation to seek justice, make peace, show compassion, be salt, leaven and lamp, and be able to articulate a call to turn around'. This approach seeks to enable people to see that God is already involved in redeeming the world. He compared this model of training to that of a coach equipping and enabling the team, which does the real playing.

In order to pursue the missiological approach in theological education, he challenged traditional theological affirmations and proposed a hermeneutical stance that reflects Jesus' way of handling scriptures—with a boldness that questioned contemporary hermeneutics of his time. Jesus' hermeneutical stance also included a clear self-understanding and commitment to God's just reign. This hermeneutical stance must help students to go about the task of selecting, prioritising, deconstructing and reconstructing all the

time. Calling all hermeneutics of traditional theology as domination endorsing, 'the only way to correct it is to deliberately interpret scriptures from the perspective of the suffering people'.

Using examples from Tamilnadu Theological Seminary, Carr described how exposure programs to rural life, to urban poor localities and to NGOs or people's movements have enriched students' theological reflections on such issues as environmental degradation, poverty and oppression, injustice and struggles for life.

He also cited the importance of courses on communication awareness, social analysis and feminist theology. By communication he meant not only acquiring skills to handle sophisticated communication equipment or even skills in brainwashing techniques, but skills to perceive the hidden agendas of storytellers, film producers and advertisers, and to critique how all these have led to our inability to judge rightly.

He added that the ability to analyse society is an important part of theological education. Knowing to ask the right questions, e.g. why the rich get richer and the poor poorer, will help greatly in

checking some of our traditional theological affirmations, such as those about blessing and prosperity.

Analysing issues involving distant forces will also enrich analysis of the immediate situation.

'If we discover that we have been led to believe in lies, which in the end distorts the image of God who is love and passionate for justice, then we need to learn how to counter their lies and help the people under the spell of the lies to come out,' he said.

Emphasising the imperative need for contextual theology, Carr suggested that 'the situation of women being the same in most parts of the world, learning feminist theology for its own sake and for the sake of a relevant model to do theology from the perspective of the least' is necessary.

'All of us men need to undergo a thorough conversion from the ways in which we have been brought up, believing that God endorses male superiority, as God created men to rule and the women to serve. This conversion will help us to go through other conversions, i.e. from the belief that the rich and the powerful are indeed the blessed of God,' he added.

Mainstreaming Asian Feminism



Dr Hope S. Antone

The fifth lecture, entitled 'Mainstreaming Asian Feminism in Theological Education', was given by Hope S. Antone. She shared some of her experiences of teaching feminist theologies, both in a seminary setting and with grassroots women through the Asian Women's Resource Centre for Culture and Theology.

Hope described Asian feminism as more than head knowledge of feminist theories, for it involves perspective, lifestyle, commitment and advocacy through empowering women and other marginalized sectors of society for genuine equality and just partnership.

Asian feminism is also more than a language issue for it goes into the nuances and images that even inclusive words or nonsexist language cannot simply change.

In Asia, it is so easy to dismiss sexist language as a Western issue since a number of Asian languages and dialects have common pronouns (for male and female). But even the use of such common pronouns has not eliminated the predominantly male images of God.

Feminism is very contextual, holistic and integrated in approach. It begins with women's concrete experiences. It combines different fields or disciplines: the Bible, theology, ethics, analysis, psy-

chology, sociology, culture etc. It is not limited to learning that happens in the classroom. It uses alternative ways of teaching-learning that are experiential, participatory, critical and challenging.

Situating Asian feminism in the Asian plural context, she further described it as 'inclusive of men, youth and children, and everything in God's creation. Our vision is partnership in love and service, justice in relationships, fulfilment in our callings and empowerment of all for fullness of life.'

Why is it important to mainstream feminism in theological education? It may be ideal to have it as one of the lenses through which every course is conducted, but as long as teachers are not yet able to integrate it in their courses, it is important to offer it as a required course for all students.

It is also equally important for teachers to be updated in this area. Sometimes one big source of resistance is teachers allergic to feminism, due to a limited, if not distorted, knowledge of the field. It is important that the allergy or aversion to feminism is dealt with openly, and it can be done when students and teachers alike have an exposure to the field.

Hope qualified the field as Asian feminism because 'we are aware that there are many streams of feminism. Here in Asia, we have yet to find a common Asian term that would appropriately name what we are doing.

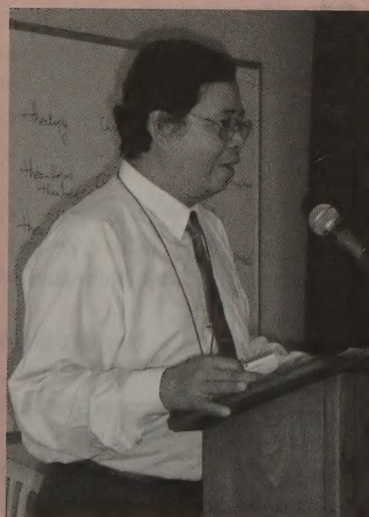
'But since we Asians have to use the English language in order to understand each other, we can continue to use feminism, in identification and solidarity with the global movement, but qualifying what we are about as Asian feminism. By this we mean a movement for empowerment that is grounded in our Asian realities of deep plurality in faith, culture and spirituality as well as serious problems of poverty and injustice.'

Scenes from the Ecumenical Lectures

The CCA-MIT-ATEM Ecumenical Lectures also featured small-group workshops with the speakers on their respective topics. This gave them more time for interaction with theological students and faculty.

There was also an evening that featured friendly conversations with the four speakers and Dr Simon Pau Khan En. The topic was feminist theology and it was facilitated by Dr Anna May Say Pa, principal of MIT.

On 8 March, Hope Antone addressed the graduating students of MIT with a speech entitled 'Rekindle the Gift of God', based on 2 Timothy 1:1-7, and Dhyanchand Carr gave the benediction.



Programs for Empowerment and Peace

Empowering Youth through Movement Building

The CCA Youth Fund Advisory Group, consisting of subregional youth representatives drawn from the program area committees of CCA, met on 17–20 March in Hong Kong to deliberate and decide on youth fund grants for the year 2003.

Deliberating on the youth fund guidelines for the year 2004, the YFAG decided that the objective of the youth fund should be towards youth empowerment for movement building.

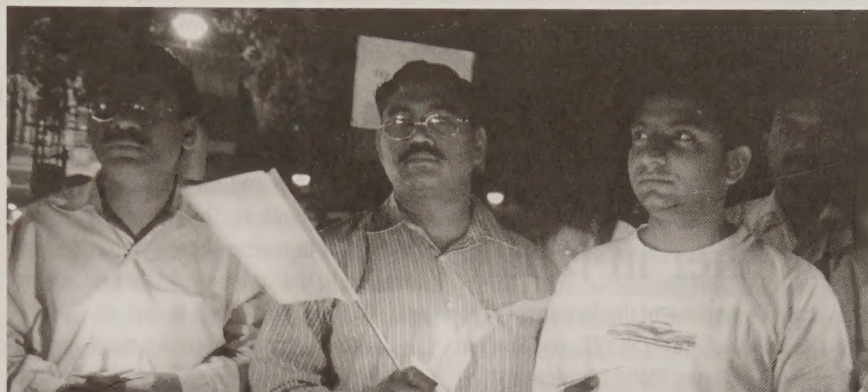
A role of CCA is to initiate, develop and strengthen programs that are ecumenical in nature, that facilitate leadership development within the churches and the ecumenical movement and play a role in movement building at local and national levels.

However, as income generation projects will continue to be important in Asia, the YFAG felt that such projects should still concretely include a focus on movement building and meet the other objectives of promoting unity in the church, peace and justice building.

The CCA Youth Fund plays a very important role in supporting and facilitating local and national level denominational and ecumenical programs for the empowerment and development of rural and urban youth in Asia. This empowerment is through programs, seminars, training courses, consultations and other initiatives with a focus on addressing issues of ecumenical leadership formation and strengthening and building the ecumenical youth movement by providing opportunities for more young people across Asia to be part of the ecumenical movement.

For this year, a total of twenty projects were granted support.

Youth Launch 'White Fridays for Peace'



Vivek Samuel Masih, right, a member of CCA-EGY PAC and the Youth Fund Advisory Group at a White Friday for Peace candlelight service in New Delhi

CCA youth joined all peace-loving peoples of the world in condemning the war on Iraq by participating in a campaign called 'White Fridays for Peace'. The campaign was done in partnership with CCA member councils and churches.

White Fridays were days of prayer and action for peace in solidarity with the people of Iraq. On each Friday during the US-led war against Iraq, participants wore white clothing, ribbons, scarves etc., prayed and lit candles for peace and took action for peace, e.g. sent protest letters to relevant authorities, held demonstrations, organised pro-peace/anti-war campaigns etc.

'White Fridays for Peace' rallies were organised in Pakistan (by the NCC Pakistan Youth Desk), Korea (by the Ecumenical Youth Council in Korea), and India (by the Church of North India and the Delhi Catholic Sabha).

A candlelight service was organised jointly by the Church of North India and the Delhi Catholic Sabha in New Delhi on 28 March. The Rt Rev. Karam Masih (Bishop of CNI) and Father Dominic Emmanuel (a Catholic priest) led the meeting. This ecumenical effort was organised by Vivek Samuel Masih, a member of CCA-EGY PAC and the Youth Fund Advisory Group. Peo-

ple from other denominations and faiths also joined in the silent protest march. The media, both print and electronic, covered the event.

CCA Youth Internships

Two internship programs at CCA are open to young people and will start this July.

The CCA youth internship aims to provide an opportunity for learning experiences for a young person in the areas of Asian ecumenical youth movement, theological and leadership formation, and different faith contextualisation perspectives.

Specifically, this year's internship aims at facilitating the publication and distribution of the Asia Pacific Students and Youth Week 2003 materials, facilitating the implementation of the North East Asia Peace Consultation 2003, working with the ecumenical youth movement in Asia and the Ecumenical Asia Pacific Students and Youth Network, through CCA Youth, and facilitating publications of the CCA Youth Network.

Another internship that will run concurrently with CCA youth internship is the Ecumenical Formation, Gender Justice and

Youth Empowerment internship, which is specifically for women under the age of 32. The intern will work with the EGY program area to coordinate, develop and implement programs for young women's leadership development in Asia.

Information and application forms for both internship programs are available on the CCA website.

Youth and Students Working Together in Japan

The Youth Committee of the National Christian Council in Japan (NCCJ), the Student Department of Japan YMCA (Student YMCA) and the SCM Cooperative Committee (SCM) held their Third Ecumenical Student and Youth Conference under the theme 'Justpeace for Overcoming Violence' at Gotenba, Shizuoka, on 20–22 March 2003. As the program was being held, the US-UK

military attack against Iraq had begun, and the Japanese government had officially announced its support due to the security treaty between Japan and the US. The participants recognised that the behaviour of such governments was a most vicious reality of violence. They were sensitised to ways they could overcome violence initiated by the militaristic tension in the Middle East under US hegemony.

Participants also learned about the historical background of violence supported by US churches and the nature of violence in a biblical context. They reviewed the brokenness of Japanese churches, having been involved in the violence of Japanese history and keeping silent even today.

Affirming that war is the most unjustified form of violence and that life is a gift from God, they appealed for peace with justice through an immediate end to the military attack against Iraq. They also appealed for just peace through 'peace and reconciliation' both domestically and internationally, and for mutual responsibility among

ecumenical organisations. Before the conference, the youth organisations had been working on an action plan to empower students and youth. This included building a network for the ecumenical movement at the local level, mutual support for common issues and concerns, empowering young ecumenical leadership and creating solidarity with Asian churches.

The Youth Committee of NCCJ has been taking responsibility for building a national ecumenical leadership training. In 2001, the training tackled current issues, such as US militarism following the 11 September 2001 incident, Japan's official war responsibility as portrayed in a historical textbook and the government's haste to effect the Emergency Legislation. The Youth Committee of NCCJ affirmed the need to educate young students and youth regarding Japan's war responsibility. In 2002 the training program carried the theme 'Pursuing the Truth for Peace with Justice'. Apart from the usual training for youth and students, Asia Youth Week was also celebrated.

Evaluation of Joint CCA-UNESCAP Training Program

A comprehensive evaluation report of the three-year program 'Strengthening National HRD Capabilities in Poverty Alleviation and Conflict Negotiation Skills for Youth', under the joint auspices of the CCA and UNESCAP, is now due for publication, following the completion of a series of evaluation missions in the five participating countries. The external evaluation of the national-level courses in Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Cambodia, the Philippines and India were conducted from February to May.

The evaluation missions to the five participating countries were led and coordinated jointly by Carmencita P. Karagdag, CCA consultant for the joint CCA-UNESCAP training project, and Asa Jonsson, former associate social affairs officer of the Health and Development Section of the Emerging Social Issues Division of UNESCAP.

Two external evaluators, Dr Prema Devaraj from a Malaysian women's NGO and Prof. Milagros R. Espinas from the University of the Philippines, were recruited to

conduct the interviews with course participants, who partici-

pated in focus-group discussions. Meetings were also held with the national counterpart organisations: the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports in Sri Lanka, the Department of Social Welfare in Myanmar, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports in Cambodia, the Department of Social Welfare and Development in the Philippines, and the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports of the Government of India.

The three-year training program is a collaborative effort of the CCA, UNESCAP and the Evangelische Zentralstelle für Entwicklungshilfe (EZE) in Germany. Its beginnings can be traced to the collaboration between the WCC and ESCAP in the Asia-Pacific region.

Carmencita Karagdag, CCA consultant, Prof. Milagros Espinas, external evaluator for the project, and Check Lim, vice-chief of the Planning Office of the Youth Department of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of the Kingdom of Cambodia during the focus-group discussion with course participants in Phnom Penh on 3 May 2003



Moving towards Interfaith Cooperation

Consultation on interreligious cooperation in Asia

We have experienced conflicts in the past, sometimes in the very recent past, but we believe that violence is not the way forward. Our appeal is that all religious communities in Asia join hands to make our region one in which our shared values of peace, compassion, justice and harmony truly come to shape and characterise our Asian societies.'

This was the conclusion of the thirty-seven participants from fourteen Asian countries attending the Consultation on Interreligious Cooperation in Asia, held 5–10 April 2003 in Parapat, Indonesia. The participants, coming from the four major faiths of Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism and

Christianity, met to seek the commonalities they share as a starting point for cooperation in working towards peace, justice and sustainable lifestyles.

On the first day of the consultation, Asghar Ali Engineer, a Muslim from India, encouraged all participants to set religious rituals aside because rituals are often where the different faiths come into conflict. Rather all should focus on the common values taught by each faith.

To stress his point, Mr Engineer said, 'All the religions are for the benefit of humanity. All are unique and are not against each other. Yes, we have our differences, especially if we compare our culturally bound rituals, but we must start to look at the

things we have in common—our values.' Agreeing with Mr Engineer, His Grace Kanagaraja Kdamba Kanana of Sri Lanka expressed the importance of values in the Hindu faith by quoting from religious writings. 'Lord Krishna gave the peace formula very succinctly in the following verse, "He who lives devoid of all attachment, giving up desires, egoism and the sense of I and mine, attains peace." (Bhagavad-Gita 2.71)'

Buddhism emphasises the same values according to Venerable Thich Qia Quang of Vietnam. He shared the Buddhist values found in the Noble Eightfold Path as being right understanding, right thoughts, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concen-



Participants at the Consultation on Interreligious Cooperation in Asia held in Parapat

tration. These are values all faiths hold in common and strive to teach and practise.

Another Buddhist, Ms Lapapan Supamanta from Thailand shared how all religions have value and are practised by different people to meet their specific culture and needs. This diversity is essential in making it possible for all people to find peace in their lives and answers to their problems.

'One way to look at diversity of faith,' she said, 'is just like a medicine. Even for the same illness there are a variety of medicines that work. But a patient takes only one kind that is most suitable according to the condition. Similarly, I feel that Buddhism makes sense to me. It fits my inclination, my nature. But for other people, other religions might suit them even better. So long as people get well from the disease by taking a particular medicine, it is ridiculous to fight over differences of active ingredients written on the labels of the medicine bottles.'

Ms Anna Marsiana from Indonesia urged participants to also look at the traditional values our Asian communities practised long before 'modernisation'. These tradi-

tional values are often closely connected to our religious values and can help us live together peacefully and supportively.

Reflecting on her experiences growing up in a Christian community Ms Marsiana said that 'traditional values often have much to teach us about peace and living together in community. One such value is expressed by a saying, "It is better to live in a house surrounded with *pager mangkok* (walls made of bowls) rather than in a house surrounded by *pager tembok* (walls made of bricks)." *Mangkok* is a bowl, the symbol of food. Food is the symbol of life itself. The idea of *pager mangkok* wisdom is that life is a blessing—the more we share the more we are blessed. *Pager mangkok* wisdom teaches us to live with the value of caring and sharing.'

Interfaith cooperation is the responsibility of all people in society, not just the religious leaders. However, religious leaders play an important role because they give people direction and they influence the behaviour of the lay community. Therefore, a special challenge must be given to them.

'Religious leaders must step out of their spiritual cages and go among the people and



Hizkias Assefa

raise awareness so the people are motivated to overcome all their divisions and barricades and unite to create a new world free of all exploitation, injustice and oppression. Religious leaders must come together with an interfaith approach to work towards a universal set of principles for organising human society and struggle to achieve a liberating social order with the people. The oppressed people are the hope for living together in the future and we must serve them and help them to realise their true power and capacity to inherit and rule the earth,' His Grace Kanana said.

In the light of the serious political, economic and social conflicts that confront our world today, Mr Hizkias Assefa of Kenya, Africa, said that one of the major functions of religion is to be the conscience of humanity. He expressed this concern in some very crucial questions.

'What is fuelling the leaders of this world? How far are we willing to push greed and lust until we destroy the world? How come we are prepared to use multimillion-dollar bombs to kill people who are living on one to two dollars per day? How can we spend billions of dollars a year on weapons to kill those already dying is a serious ethical prob-



Small-group discussion

lem. This is not a political problem. This is a deep spiritual and ethical problem. It seems we have lost our sense of who we are and what the purposes of leaders are and what our duties are to each other as humanity. What we need is not more knowledge, because we have plenty of knowledge, we need wisdom on how to use our knowledge. Where is the voice of the religious people calling for wisdom and compassion? How is it that the world succumbs to greed and violence? How can our religious and faith institutions help us in understanding these challenges?

There was a consensus among the participants that our different faiths can make a significant difference if we but learn to work together in cooperation rather than competing with each other. In politics we use power to solve these conflicts. According to Mr Hizkias it is only a matter of time until those who have pushed others will be

pushed back and that will result in growing anger and violence.

'Deep down every person is a spiritual being. If we go deep enough, we will be able to get hold of this spirituality. Even those people who call themselves atheists share many of the same values that we hold. But they refuse to call it God. If you create space to dialogue without this religious umbrella you come to the same conclusions. This type of deep reflection involves the mind, the heart and the spirit,' concluded Hizkias, who practises the Christian faith.

The consultation, sponsored jointly by the Christian Conference of Asia, the Asia-Pacific Alliance of YMCAs, Church Development Service (EED) and the Communion of Churches in Indonesia (PGI), is expected to be the first of a series of interfaith activities to build understanding and strengthen the movement for justice and peace regionally.

A working committee drawing people from each of the faiths has been established to carry forward the recommendations made by the consultation. These will include establishing a website where materials related to interfaith cooperation can be collected, further consultations on gender justice, and the creation of a justice and peace fund for Asia to support local initiated projects focusing on interfaith justice and peace building.

A total of fourteen papers were presented at the consultation. These papers, as well as the findings of the consultation, will soon be published in a full report. This report will be available from CCA.

—Max Ediger

(Max Ediger is the director for research in the Documentation for Action Groups in Asia and is also coordinating the program on JustPeace in DAGA.)

CATS IV: In Quest of Pedagogies of Encounter

How do we build communities of peace and justice in Asia? What pedagogies of encounter with 'the other' will help build communities? These are some of the questions behind the theme, 'Building Communities: Asians in Search of New Pedagogies of Encounter', which will be the focus of the Fourth Congress of Asian Theologians (CATS IV).

Plans are underway for congress, which is set for 4–10 August 2003 in Chiang Mai, Thailand. No less than eighty Asian theologians and guests are expected to gather.

Unique to this fourth gathering is the one-day women's forum, to be held on 4 August for all the women participants of CATS IV. This is a special time for women to be together and to share concerns as women theologians in a predominantly male-dominated field and gathering. The women's forum is expected to make a collective statement at the CATS gathering.

Like in previous CATS gatherings, the keynote address and theme presentations will be made by Asian theologians.

Dr Wong Wai Ching, a professor at the Chinese University of Hong Kong and the current comoderator of CATS, will give the keynote address. Responding to her will be Dr P. Mohan Larbeer, a Dalit theologian who is currently principal of Tamilnadu Theological Seminary in India.

Theme presenters will be Dr Clive Pearson, professor at United Theological College in Australia, who will make a religious and cultural proposal on the theme, and Dr Ninan Koshy,

former director of International Affairs at the World Council of Churches, who will make a sociopolitical and economic proposal on the theme.

Responding to Dr Pearson will be Sr Dr Mary John Mananzan, president of St Scholastica's College in the Philippines, and to Koshy Dr Gabriele Dietrich, professor of social analysis at the Tamilnadu Theological Seminary in India.

There will also be time for participants to meet in discipline groups: religious education, missiology, biblical hermeneutics, ecumenism, theological methods, ethics and social analysis, and spirituality and liturgy. Later there will be time for issue groups to deal with issues that may arise from the presentations and discussions.

CATS is an independent body but presently it is assisted and facilitated by the Christian Conference of Asia. Participation in CATS is through membership. However, limited space is also given to overseas guests.

CATS is run by a continuation committee composed of elected individuals and representatives of the following organisations: CCA, PTCA (Program for Theologies and Cultures in Asia), ATESEA (Association of Theological Education in South East Asia) and SATHRI (South Asia Theological Research Institute).

Hosting CATS this year is the Payap University in Chiang Mai, Thailand, led by Dr Pradit Takerngangsit, vice president of Payap University.

Transforming Tourism for Peace and Justice

Consultation on 'Tourism, Traditions and Terrorism'

We believe crisis management is not the key to the future of tourism, rather, people-centred concerns should become the core of our approach.' Thus said the participants of a consultation on 'Tourism, Traditions and Terrorism', held 28 April – 1 May in Bangkok, Thailand. The consultation was coorganised by the Christian Conference of Asia and the Ecumenical Coalition on Tourism (ECOT).

The group consisted of representatives of civil society and academic and religious bodies from Australia, Bangladesh, Myanmar, France, Germany, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Korea, Malaysia and Thailand.

The group recognised that the vocabulary of a new tourism world order includes words like sustainability, empowerment, participation, partnership, peace, good governance etc., which indicate the globalisation of the tourism discourse.

Expressing their support for peace movements around the world advocating solidarity with the people of Iraq, who have suffered two wars and sanctions, the group called for a boycott of corporate products and services from member countries of the US-UK-led coalition that waged the war against Iraq.

Burning issues cited included:

- an attempt to lease the Andaman and Nicobar Islands to foreign corporations in India,
- the corporate takeover and environmental degradation of Koh Chang Island in Thailand,
- reclamation of the Yung Shue Wan Harbour for large shops and restaurants on Lamma Island, Hong Kong,
- displacement of people in round houses in Fujian, China,
- use of forced and prison labour for tourism infrastructure in Myanmar,
- the alienation of communities in Bali,

- increasing sex tourism, trafficking and child pornography.

All these show that, besides being a high-risk business, the impact of tourism on local areas have consequences for communities around the world.

The debate on sustainable tourism must give due importance and consideration to the issues that concern human dignity and the protection of nature. The group also appealed to the World Heritage Movement to ensure that there is no displacement of people at designated sites.

In a statement, the group appealed to governments, intergovernmental agencies and the tourism industry to take a more responsible, accountable and cautious approach to its development. 'When we view tourist numbers and targets, we are aware that statistics can lead to false economics. Therefore, people's movements and community representatives must lobby governments that tourism development is often an



Working *with* the Differently Abled

Who sets the ecumenical agenda of churches in solidarity with differently abled persons?

irreversible process that requires industry, corporations, aid agencies and governments not to use subsidies as an incentive to encourage thoughtless tourism projects, activities and products.' Instead, 'Any type of tourism should be developed on the basis of local needs, motivations and paths,' the group stated. The group likened tourism to terrorism, i.e. as a form of aggression on unsuspecting communities, cultures and the environment. As long as commodification and conspicuous consumption, unsustainable uses of natural resources and unfair labour and trade practices are the norm in tourism, it would never be a vehicle of peace and justice.

Participants strongly urged people of goodwill to strive to turn the moment of crisis and angst into one of hope and faith in humanity and its history. We pledge to fight the dark forces of globalisation, terror, violence and corporate tyranny and uphold and restore the values of dialogue, participation, democratisation and self-determination.

In a press release, the participants expressed deep-felt sympathy and condolences to the families of those who have died and have fallen ill due to the severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), which has claimed the lives of several hundred people and infected thousands.

Participants observed that the concern for tourist arrivals appears to be more important than the health and wellbeing of people. This has resulted in an attempt to misrepresent the safety of the environment. No doubt tourism is affected by war, disease and other unexpected happenings, which have a devastating impact on economies heavily dependent on tourism, but it must not undermine the right to full and correct information.

The group stated that the outbreak of SARS 'has once again revealed the fickle foundations of tourism as a reliable economic activity. The excessive dependence on this industry for economic development can be disastrous for nations and communities. In solidarity with nations and people who have suffered from the virus we hope that the period of fear and crisis will soon give way to normalcy.'

A group of twenty-four participants, including differently abled persons, representing eight national councils and ecumenical partners met in Bangkok on 10–15 March to set the 'Ecumenical Agenda of Churches in Solidarity with Differently Abled Persons'. The meeting was jointly organised by the Christian Conference of Asia and the Ecumenical Disability Advocates Network (EDAN, which is the World Council of Churches' program on persons with disabilities).

The group noted that there are about 600 million people with disabilities in the world and, of these, women are twice discriminated. The negative attitudes of others reduce people with disabilities to objects of ridicule and pity, thereby marring their abilities and self-esteem.

While many cities spend millions on the most inane of things they do very little to provide for the needs of disabled citizens. Hence, people with disabilities are often not facilitated to participate fully in the life of the society. Even church-related institutions are unable to provide meaningful employment and opportunities for participation in programs to those with disabilities.

Apart from a short supply of proper medical treatment and care, the disabled often despair at society's inadequacy to address their sociopsychological and physical needs. In many cases there may have been sincere efforts to develop legislation to safeguard the rights of and facilities for people with disabilities but often this legislation is not implemented. This can include broad measures for the prevention and early de-



Lee Ye Ja, Korea

tection of disabilities, education, employment, social security, research and development, barrier-free access and facilities.

Theological Reflection

Affirming that persons with disabilities reflect God's image, the group recalled Christ's mindfulness of those suffering in body, mind and spirit through reaching out with compassion and providing both physical healing and wholeness, thereby transforming their lives. Jesus challenged the Jewish law by not just healing invalids, but transforming their lives. This brings into focus the need for prompt action.

Paul recognised the indispensability of persons with disabilities (1 Corinthians 12:22) while Acts 10:39a shows that believers are duty bound to bring 'life in all its fullness' to the marginalised and stigmatised disabled persons, who are deprived of social justice and equal opportunities in life.

Hence, being in solidarity with the differently abled may involve the element of risk—risking one's comfort, status and life!

Challenges for the Ecumenical Movement and the Churches

The group challenged the CCA and WCC to keep disability on their ecumenical agenda

and to do all they can to keep the concerns of persons with disabilities in focus.

The churches are particularly challenged to address disability concerns through integrated education, vocational training for self-employment and necessary medical assistance for mobility and meaningful existence. They can also use appropriate forums, including the pulpit, to build awareness on positive attitudes towards disability.

Churches also need to assess public building structures, including church buildings on their accessibility for the disabled and ensure their full participation and active involvement in all church-related programs.

Churches could organise an 'inclusive solidarity march' on important national and international days symbolising solidarity, integration and a celebration of disability, thus sensitising communities and promoting the self-esteem of those who are differently abled.

Churches could also establish church stations to meet the various needs of disabled persons, resource centres providing counselling, vocational guidance, therapeutic and referral services.

Integration, the prime condition to live in a society with equal opportunities and



Ying-Bo Joseph Tsai, Taiwan

equal rights, cannot be achieved by doing things **for** people with disabilities but by doing things **with** them. It is crucial that discriminating practices and widespread aversion to persons with disabilities are put aside.

See the CCA website for the full text of the conference statement.



Waters of Life: Enough for All!

A reflection for Environment Sunday by Per Larsson

Possible texts: Isaiah 55:1, 10–11/13, 1 Peter 3:18–21, Revelation 7:16–17, John 4:4–15

On 1 June many churches celebrate Environment Sunday. We are happy that this is the second year we can point together to this part of Christian faith, which is becoming more and more important here and in the entire world. We are convinced that our God is deeply concerned with the present state of God's creation, our physical world. This special Sunday God wants to challenge us: 'How do you human beings, created in my

image, take care of my creation and the beautiful natural environment I gave you? The earth is the jewel in my universe.'

God's creation is now threatened in many ways, as all of us know. This world, where we are called to preach salvation given to us in Jesus Christ, might not be inhabitable by humans or might not be there at all after a few more generations.

This is if we allow present trends to continue. Christians in many parts of the world

are nowadays discovering their special role and responsibility for environmental protection. This is simply because the Bible carries to us the deepest and best knowledge about the Creator, which is given throughout the centuries. Christianity and creation belong together! Just start to look out for the combination of the two words 'Christian' and 'environment' on the Internet. You will find thousands of web-sites.



Lake Toba in Northern Sumatra, Indonesia

'Water of Life—Enough for All!' is our theme this year. It is about God's great and wonderful gift of water, so necessary for both our bodies and our souls. Without water there is no life. Nothing can survive, grow and flourish without water.

It is not surprising, then, that water is a very significant image in the Bible. Throughout the Old Testament, we learn that God provides God's creation and human beings with an abundance of water. As a matter of fact, the earth could be called 'the water planet' since it consists of so much water. Even our own body consists of more than 70 per cent water. The river from Eden (is it not in present-day devastated Iraq?) flowed abundantly and supplied the beautiful garden with plenty of fresh and healthy water.

The Psalms, Proverbs and other books in the Bible also tell us about this wonderful abundance. Our text from Isaiah speaks about its life-giving abundance to sustain agriculture and food for the whole creation. It is very clear that God provides us with enough water—even in a desert situation of biblical lands. We human beings must recognise God as the giver of all water. If we stop doing that, we will be punished. Already in the Old Testament it is clear that this abundant supply of water requires planning and care from human beings. Obedience and worship of God are necessary if we shall have enough water.

For Christians, water certainly has both direct real importance and deep spiritual significance. Jesus is concerned with both!

Jesus' discussion with the Samaritan woman in the gospel for today deals with both these aspects of water. Jesus and the woman met at a deep well in Sychar. It was not a water tank or other device for gathering water. It was the ancient well of the city, well known by all, loved by all, since all the inhabitants of the city were totally dependent on it. It was probably surrounded by

some sheltering trees with fresh, green, lush leaves, whose roots were deep down in the moist soil close to the well, where they could get the necessary water. Out of this well of Sychar came fresh and living water, gushing forth out of the depths.

The dialogue in this gospel text moves from ordinary water to the thirst for depth within us, a place where we can anchor our whole life for meaning and true content. All our thirst is a thirst within a greater one—for God! As Jesus tells the woman at the well: 'Those who drink the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I give them will become a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.' (John 4:14) What a beautiful image!

The simple gift of water on earth becomes the sacred gift of God from heaven—to cleanse, heal and transform both our bodies and our souls.

Why is it that Christians today have so much trouble making the connection between the physical and spiritual aspects of water? How can we read all these things about water in the Bible and not see any relation to the alarming state of water all around us in the world?

Despite the abundance of water on the earth, we humans have done a poor job of taking care of it. We consume it, poison it and waste it, indifferent to the consequences: too many people, too little water, water in the wrong places and in the wrong amounts. Did you know that 1.2 billion people in the world do not have access to clean and safe drinking water and 2.4 billion do not have adequate sanitation due to polluted waters?

This is why the United Nations has declared this year 2003 as 'The Year of Freshwater' and the churches devote this Environment Sunday to 'Waters of Life—Enough for All'. The World Council of Churches recently found out that 80 per cent of all diseases in poor countries are related

to poor drinking water and poor sanitation. As much as 40 per cent of the world's population goes thirsty every year nowadays, with some countries consuming more and more while others get less and less. In the US, water usage continues to climb, while it has been cut in half in the last thirty years in East Africa. Women and children there now walk an average of 21 minutes each trip to collect water. How long a time do you need to walk to find fresh and healthy water?

Here in Hong Kong the water situation is not at all as good as it should be if we look at the general standard of living we have achieved. There has been a great change for the worse compared with Hong Kong forty years ago. While we are privileged to have fairly decent drinking water from our taps, the beautiful waters surrounding our territory are now shamefully polluted. Many foreigners coming here talk about it. This year more beaches (in the western side) have been declared unsuitable for swimming. Some people do not dare to swim anywhere in the region. Victoria Harbour, the source and reason for the existence of our beautiful city, has become filthy and full of plastic bottles and dangerous bacteria.

Our drinking water is also threatened, even if the government is trying to secure a clean supply from the mainland. Business interests are given priority over the most basic human right, the right of access to clean water. We can understand—and agree to a certain extent!—that economic development might necessarily have its environmental price. But other comparable 'world cities' such as Singapore, London, New York and Stockholm, which were all surrounded by quite filthy and dirty waters thirty to forty years ago, have cleaned them up now. It is even possible to swim in many places right in the centre of these cities nowadays! All agree: the driving forces behind the change are a combination of community action and



government will. Why is this lacking in Hong Kong? Should not the churches as committed faith communities raise their voices so that the waters also become cleaner here?

As part of China, we Christians of Hong Kong should also be aware of the great problems concerning water on the mainland. This is quite evident to anyone travelling in China. There is disastrous pollution of many of China's rivers, e.g. in Guangdong and the Yellow River, causing sickness and shortened lives for tens of thousands of people. And the drastic lowering of the groundwater level in large parts of north-

ern China is now becoming a great concern, not only for China itself but for the whole world. It must also be said however that the central government takes environmental questions comparatively more seriously than the government of Hong Kong. There are also a few interesting signs of environmental involvement among our fellow Christians there, mainly in the Roman Catholic Church.

Jesus came that all human beings might have life and have it abundantly. He clearly showed throughout his life that he cares both about our spiritual and physical well-

being. Abundant life is a combined spiritual and physical reality. The one who is touched by his Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Love, the fountain of living water, cannot close their eyes to the physical water situation of the world. 'Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters: and you that have no money come buy and eat!' (Isaiah 55:1) What could we do in our congregation to make this become a reality in the full sense of 'abundant life for all'?

(The Rev. Per Larsson teaches at the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Hong Kong.)

Interfaith Dialogue

Asia to host conference on religion and globalisation

Payap University's Institute for the Study of Religion and Culture and the Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies will host an international and interfaith academic conference on Religion and Globalisation in Chiang Mai, Thailand, on 27 July – 2 August 2003.

The conference seeks to have an interfaith dialogue among Buddhists, Christians, Muslims and members of other religious communities through plenary speeches, panels and papers. The dialogue will be based on five themes:

- Religious Diversity and Interfaith Relations in a Global Age,
- Religion in a Global Society,
- Religious Reform and Reformulation for a Global Age,
- Historical Perspectives in Interreligious Interaction,
- Methodological and Philosophical Issues in Intercultural and Interreligious Communication and Exchanges.

Major plenary addresses will be given by Dr Donald K. Swearer (USA), Dharma Master Hsin Tao (Myanmar), Phra Paisan Wisalo (Thailand), Bishop John Shelby Spong (USA), Bhikkuni Dhammananda (Thailand), Hon. Tarrin Nimmanhaeminda (Thai-

land), Dr Wesley Ariarajah (Sri Lanka/USA) and Dr Chandra Muzaffar (Malaysia).

Donald K. Swearer is professor of religion at Swarthmore College in Pennsylvania, whose principal area of research is Southeast Asian Buddhism, particularly in Thailand.

Dharma Master Hsin Tao founded the Museum of World Religions in Taiwan, where artefacts, knowledge and wisdom of the world's religions are gathered for an interactive educational experience intended to foster 'respect, tolerance, and love' among all religious traditions.

Phra Paisan Wisalo is a reformist Buddhist monk who has called on the government to mobilise the public to take an active part in matters concerning religion.

He has addressed many issues related to globalisation, including the impact of computers and information technology on the poor, the environment and society as a whole.

Bishop John Shelby Spong of the Episcopal Diocese of New Jersey has called for a new understanding of Christianity, one based on justice and love rather than judgmental and literal interpretations of the Bible.

Bhikkuni Dhammananda, a leading Buddhist scholar and activist in social justice and women's issues, has been in the forefront of the movement to re-establish an order of bhikkunis (female monks) in Thailand. Her ordination in Sri Lanka in 2001 made her a controversial figure in Thai religious life.

The Hon. Tarrin Nimmanhaeminda, Thailand's former Minister of Finance, currently a member of parliament, and a leader in the Democrat political party, was the principal designer of Thailand's economic recovery program following the Asian and Thai economic collapse.

Dr Wesley Ariarajah, a Professor of Ecumenical Theology at Drew University, is a former staff member of the World Council of Churches, leading its Interfaith Dialogue program for more than ten years.

Dr Chandra Muzaffar, an Islamic scholar and human rights advocate, will speak on Religion and Society in a Global Age. Professor at the Centre for Civilisational Dialogue, University of Malaysia, he is President of the International Movement for a Just World (JUST) in Malaysia.

Participation in the conference is by registration.

Introducing the National Council of Churches in Korea

Seeking unity, reunification and reconciliation

The National Council of Churches in Korea was founded in 1924, and has been the leading force of the ecumenical movement in South Korea for seventy-eight years. It includes mainline denominations such as the Presbyterian Church of Korea (PCK), the Korean Methodist Church (KMC) and the Presbyterian Church of the Republic of Korea (PROK). Churches that have joined more recently are the Full Gospel Church Assembly of God, the Salvation Army, the Anglican Church and the Korea Evangelical Church. The Korea Orthodox Church is currently a probationary member. These denominations consist of 6 million people in 25,000 congregations throughout the nation.

A Brief Introduction to Korean History

The Korean Peninsula is located in Northeast Asia between China and Japan. Anthropologically, the Koreans are descended from the Mongol race and their language belongs to the Ural Altai group. Its cultural heritage is therefore Siberian with Chinese influences. Their cultural roots lie in Shamanism with both Buddhism and Confucianism being deeply influential and widely practised. Now on the global stage, the Korean people's use of advanced disciplines such as information technology is of an international standard. Their culture remains unique and they have wide experience of international conflict.

NCCK's Structure, Membership and Current Officebearers

The NCCK structure is composed of the general assembly, which meets annually, an executive committee which meets quarterly, and fifteen program committees. The general assembly consists of 147 delegates nominated by the constituent denominations and the executive consists of forty-eight board members also so nominated. The program committees undertake work in the spirit of the Korean ecumenical movement. Activities include involvement in the movement for the reunification of Korea and the human rights movement. These interests harness the long-held interest of activists and the general population.

The officers include Rev. Choi Sung Kyu (Assembly of God), moderator, Rev. Park Jong Wha (Presbyterian Church of the Republic of Korea) and Fr Kim Jae Yeol (Anglican Church) and Rev. Lee Jong Bok (Korean Methodist Church), vice-moderators.

Priorities for the Current Year

In parallel with Korean politics that have changed from an authoritarian style to a democracy, NCCK has been working for change in church leadership from charismatic dictatorship to democracy. Circumventing the National Security Law, which prohibits contact between citizens of the South and North, the NCCK initiated and



A 'Human Chains' campaign for reunification

facilitated discussion between the churches of North and South Korea. These discussions, which centred on reunification issues, began in 1984 in the Tozanso YMCA International House near Mount Fuji in Japan. Thereafter delegates met in Glion, an alpine village near Lausanne in Switzerland, between 1986 and 1995.

During that period, the NCCK launched the Unification Committee, initiated the unification movement in the churches and became more effectively involved in reconciliation between the North and South. At this point the Unification Committee became central to NCCK's work. It still works on a practical level and in a variety of ways with church groups and NGOs.

Through its Unity Committee, the NCCK facilitates discussions between the Protestant and Catholic churches. Discussions focus on theological understanding and practical liturgical exchange to enable those who wish to practise and promote unity. From their commitment and the spirit of sharing from their different heritages and church backgrounds, we are expecting the development of socioeconomic justice and a sense of reformation in the churches.

Boldly daring, we seek to serve the poor and address women's issues such as gender equality in church activities. In addition, NCCK member churches fulfil a wide range of ministries based on a liberationist theological perspective. These include issues arising from human rights violations, women's rights and the promotion of the rights of migrant workers.

NCCK has worked for many decades for international cooperation in conjunction with such organisations as the World Council of Churches and the Christian Conference of Asia. It has, therefore, been closely involved in ecumenical relations for a long time.

After the recent war against Iraq, there is the threat that the next war would arise from the America-North Korea nuclear debate. The North seems to expect this conflict to be resolved through peaceful negotiations between America, North Korea, China, Japan and South Korea. Unfortunately, South Korea has had a war stigma since the Korean War.



77th Anniversary of NCCK, 2001



Picket in Seoul: 'Abolish the Trainee System'

Present Struggles and Challenges

At the heart of the ecumenical movement's problem lies denominational individualism that is very strong within the churches. So we try to work together and think together in practical ways, like justice orientation but including both theological and human rights thinking. However, the difficulties persist. Still we have to fight for ecumenical reconciliation against the strongly entrenched denominational orientation.

We emphasise the importance of extending interdenominational dialogue to inter-faith dialogue with Islam, the indigenous Korean religion Chun Do Kyo (Heavenly

Way), Buddhism, Confucianism and Won Buddhism.

In face of the war against Iraq, we prayed for the innocent Iraqi people and all peace activists and issued anti-war statements. Continually we pray for peacekeeping people in the global network.

Our present General Secretary, Rev. Dr Paik Do Woong, joined NCCK in April 2002. He is an ordained minister of the Presbyterian Church of Korea with a doctoral degree from Korea-Fuller Seminary. He believes that the seeds of the ecumenical movement must be grounded in the local church in its concrete situation.

—NCCK staff

Journey to Jerusalem

A Bible study on Mark 8:27–9:1 by Kwok Nai Wang

Every human being has a life journey. The question is not where but how—how people conduct their journey ‘from womb to tomb’.

Jesus’ journey was both intentional and focused. According to the synoptic gospels, Jesus first ministered to those in need in Galilee (Mark 1:14–8:26, Matthew 4:23–18:35, Luke 4:14–9:50), then he journeyed to Jerusalem with his disciples (Mark 8:27–10:52, Matthew 19:1–20:34, Luke 9:51–19:27). Jesus used this occasion to minister to his disciples, teaching them about ‘discipleship’. Finally, they recorded Jesus’ ministry in and around Jerusalem (Mark 11:16, Matthew 21–28, Luke 19:28–24:53). Therefore, Jesus’ journey is best described as his journey to Jerusalem. Luke put it very succinctly in 9:51: ‘He set his face to Jerusalem,’ (RSV) or, ‘He resolutely took the road to Jerusalem.’ (Jerusalem Bible) (cf Luke 13:22, 13:33, 17:11, 18:31, 19:11, 19:28) Jesus had decided to go to Jerusalem.

Why Jerusalem? Jerusalem was the socioreligious centre of the Jewish people. It was tightly controlled by a small group of priests, Levites, scribes and Pharisees. The Jewish culture and tradition were so institutionalised and the law so literally interpreted that ordinary people had little room to manoeuvre. Jesus went to Jerusalem to challenge this. That explained why, once inside the temple, Jesus ‘began to drive out those who sold and those who bought in the temple, overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons, and he would not

allow any one to carry anything through the temple. And he taught ...’ (Mark 11:15–17, cf Matthew 21:12–13, Luke 19:45–46)

Jesus came to challenge the old, because the old could no longer represent God’s will adequately. The old had become far too oppressive. For example, faith in God’s creation as symbolised by the fourth commandment (‘keep the Sabbath day sacred’) was no longer meaningful to people. The establishment insisted that the Sabbath was a rest day, no matter what: even if people were hungry you could not go and get food for them. If they were sick you could not care

Cheney–Rumsfeld? Oil, hi-tech, multinational business conglomerates? They are the rich and the powerful. They exist in every corner of the world. Their greed for wealth and power is without boundary. They would get rid of anybody or anything that blocks their way. They would not hesitate to use any means, including war, to achieve their aims. As a result, the poor and powerless suffer. The gap between the ‘haves’ and the ‘have nots’ continues to widen, and more and more people throughout the world suffer, having to live in abject poverty, their human dignity deprived.



The Cruciform Principle

Jesus’ journey to Jerusalem was not easy. It ended with his death.

Let us go back to the text—Mark 8:27–9:1. It began with the question: ‘Who do people say I am?’ (8:27) The text consists of three pericopes: (a) Peter’s profession of faith, 8:27–30, (b) Jesus’ prediction of his passion, 8:31–33, and (c) Jesus setting out the condition of discipleship, 8:34–

9:1.

Let us take (a) and (b) together. When Jesus asked, ‘Who do people say I am?’ the answer was easy. Peter reported what he and other disciples had heard. When Jesus asked, ‘Who do you say that I am?’ it was more difficult. Often, people do not want to disclose what they really think. But faith is personal. It is more than about what I think or what I believe, it is about what I am willing to commit to with my whole life.

Intellectually, Peter got the answer right: ‘You are the Christ.’ But who is this Christ?

for them (Mark 2:23–3:5, cf Matthew 12:1–13, Luke 6:1–10). That explained why even at the early stage of Jesus’ ministry, the pro-establishment forces discussed how to destroy him (Mark 3:6, Matthew 12:14, Luke 6:11).

What is today’s Jerusalem? In the wake of the US war on Iraq, we might think that the United States, the only superpower in the world, has become ‘Jerusalem’. The US interprets for the world what is right and what is wrong, and what is a just war. But who are behind this superpower? Bush–

Is he the Messiah the Jews expected—the one God sent to deliver them from the rule of the Romans, just as what God once did, delivering their ancestors from the bondage of Pharaoh in the land of Egypt? So when Jesus explained and predicted he was to suffer and die, Peter remonstrated with Jesus. This immediately drew Jesus' rebuke.

What does this say to us? We often choose to believe whatever is comfortable. The 'cross' certainly is extremely uncomfortable. That is why the cross to the Jews is scandalous, to the Gentiles a folly (1 Corinthians 1:23). To put this in today's context, to some of us who are serious, the cross is an impossibility. To most Christians the cross is merely an ornament, with no deep meaning attached to it.

Jesus had decided to take up the cross. His prediction that he was going to suffer and die was given three times, as recorded in the synoptic gospels (Mark 8:31, 9:31, 10:33–34, Matthew 16:21, 17:22–23, 20:18–19, Luke 9:22, 9:44, 18:32–33). Was this because it was extremely difficult for his disciples to understand and accept, or was it simply because Jesus wanted to emphasise the importance of his passion?

Jesus had decided to take up the cross, and he also demanded his disciples to do the same: 'If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross and follow me.' (Mark 8:34)

To follow Jesus is not an activity of our mind only, that we profess we are a Christian. It is an activity of our whole being: we put our whole life into this faith. The Christian faith is therefore not only a conceptual endeavour (or to borrow John Henry Cardinal Newman's terms: notional or intellectual assent, cf 'Grammar of Assent'). It is life's commitment (real assent). Thus, faith in God is always faithfulness to God.

There are two important conditions of Jesus' discipleship: (1) total renunciation, and (2) taking up one's own cross. Both are difficult.

John and James had given up their work and their family in order to follow Jesus (Mark 1:20). But they could not give up their ambitions for high positions and status (Mark 10:35–44). How true is this of us? We may be able to give up our earthly

possessions of wealth, material comfort or even our relationships, but how about our popularity or recognition by others?

To take up our cross is equally hard. We may from time to time do a few good and charitable deeds, but how about challenging the powers and principalities that suppress the weak and the young? Do we want to take up the cross and overturn unjust social structures around us?

Jesus has set an example for us. As one of the most well-written Christological hymns (Philippians 2:6ff) described, 'Jesus emptied himself so that our lives may be filled.' This kenosis has become the crux of Christian ethics. To renounce our life and take up our cross seem to be impossible. But if we have total faith in Jesus we will be able to do it. Jesus is not only our example, but our enabler as well.

The Gospel of Renunciation

Jesus' decision to renounce himself and take up the cross has become the kerygma, the core of the Christian faith (cf the Apostolic preaching found in Acts 2, 3, 4, 5, 10 and 13).

Why is kerygma the Gospel or the good news? This is Jesus' explanation: 'For anyone who wants to save his life will lose it, but anyone who loses his life for Jesus' sake and for the sake of the Gospel will save it.' (Mark 8:35)

Is this seeming contradiction true? The fact is that the cross of Jesus led to the empty tomb. Jesus' total sacrifice on the cross immediately brought about eternal life 'and after three days to rise again'. God raised him from the dead (the second part of Jesus' passion prediction, cf Acts 2:32, 3:15, 4:10, 5:30, 10:40 and 13:30). This is the pivot of Christianity. This changed human history radically, because people, who, like Jesus, decided to lay down their lives so that the lives of many others might be saved, meant that human development was able to continue.

We all can experience the bliss of giving, of sharing with others our life. 'There is more happiness in giving than in receiving.' (Acts 20:25) 'It is in dying that we are born to eternal life,' observed St Francis of Assisi. When we expand our life, i.e. use our

life for the wellbeing of others, our life is expanded, even beyond the limits of fear and death. When we determine to give up our life for a purpose, we shall truly experience the power and propensities of life.

Today we have a fragmented church irrelevant to social processes. This is because the church does not fully understand and accept the gospel of renunciation. Rather, the church nowadays is too willing and happy to follow the gospel of good life, success etc.

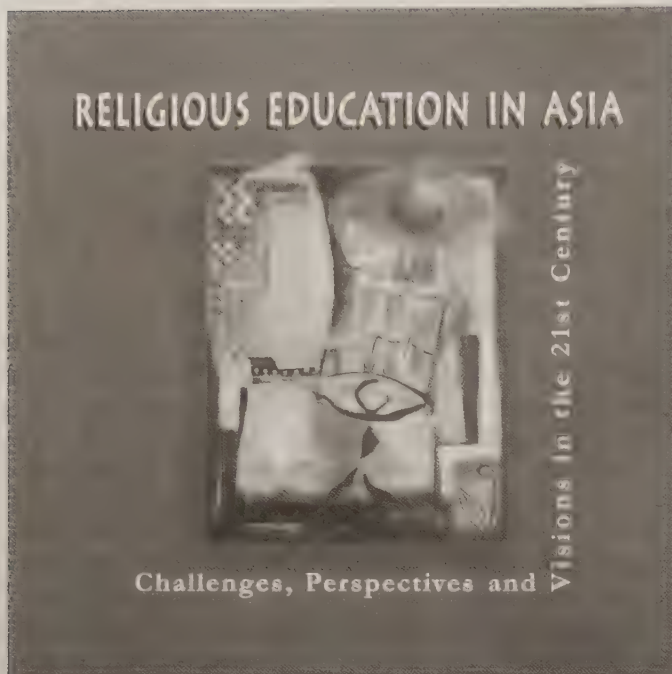
Journeying Together

We are called to make our life journey a blessing to others: by making this world a more humane world, the people more compassionate, and the church more faithful to God's calling. This is difficult, but not impossible. We must not be detracted by personal gain and ambition as well as by 'the wide and spacious road' (Matthew 7:13–14). Like Jesus, our journeying together must be focused. We must follow Jesus' footsteps and consistently challenge the powers and principalities that exploit and oppress the poor and the powerless. Like Jesus, who during his journey to Jerusalem tried to teach his disciples what discipleship is all about, we must also try our best to enable many others to truly understand and accept the gospel of renunciation. In order to do this two-fold task, we must first of all decide to renounce ourselves and take up our own cross.

This is not impossible, for as Jesus promised, 'For where two or three meet in my name, I shall be there with them.' (Matthew 18:20) All three synoptic gospels ended with Jesus' commission to the disciples. The mission of the disciples is also Jesus' mission ('com-' means 'together'). In a way, the mission of the church today is not the church's mission. It is God's mission. Wherever the church does God's mission, the power of the Holy Spirit will be imminently present.

(Rev. Kwok Nai Wang is CCA's honorary consultant for enabling local congregations. This Bible study was given at the CCA staff retreat in Hong Kong on 7 March 2003.)

Religious Education in Asia



Religious Education in Asia: Challenges, Perspectives and Visions in the 21st Century, ed. Edna Orteza (Manila, Philippines: CCA-EGY), 2003, 84 pp. Cost: US\$10

The book contains inputs by ecumenical educators during the first Asia Religious Educators' Forum (AREF), organised by the Christian Conference of Asia. Dr Kim Yong Bock shared about education as a cultural action for the sharing of life-wisdom in community, Rev. Simon Oxley traced the place of education in the modern ecumenical movement and Dr Hope Antone provided a framework for the work in religious education in a plural context using the image of mealtable sharing.

The book also contains stories of trailblazing efforts by Asian Christian educators who participated in the first Asia Religious Educators' Forum in October 2001.

As the title of the book indicates, AREF I participants reflected on the theme 'Religious Education in Asia: Challenges, Perspectives and Visions for the 21st Century'.

Produced in a popular style, the book is meant to be a resource for ecumenical learning in Asia, where there is a clear lack of resources produced by Asian educators.

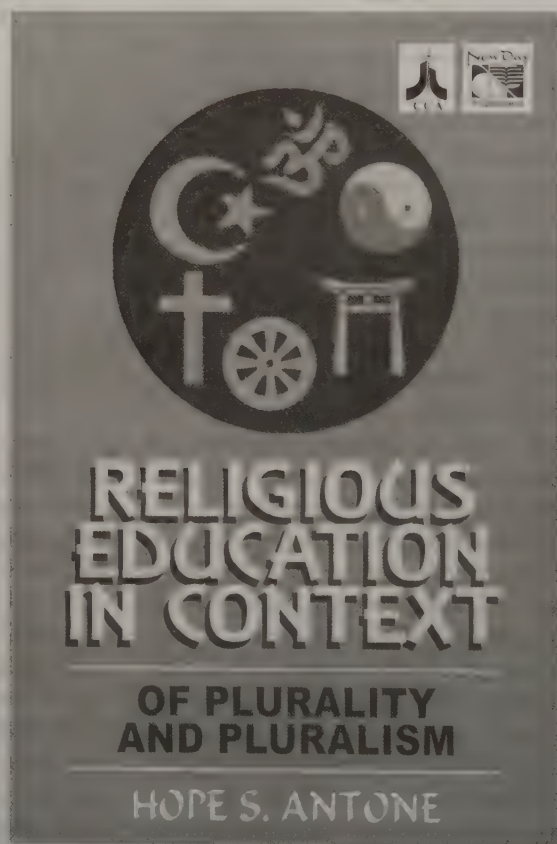
Plurality and Pluralism

Jenny Dawson reviews *Religious Education in Context of Plurality and Pluralism* by Hope S. Antone, published jointly by New Day Publishers in Manila and the Christian Conference of Asia, 2003, 142 pp.

This book blends together personal story and rigorous scholarship, nourishment and challenge, Asian insights and wider relevance, all woven together with a vibrant passion for ecumenism. It is not surprising to discover that the author is a staff member of the Christian Conference of Asia and editor of *In God's Image*, as well as being a homemaker and mother, and now recognised as an emerging Asian ecumenical leader.

At the core of the book is the call for developing a religious pluralism in the Asian religious plurality. Those who have yet to have the pleasure of reading the book may not easily distinguish between 'pluralism' and 'plurality' but this concept is central to Antone's work. She distances 'plurality', meaning the reality of diversity, from 'pluralism' as the active engagement with that diversity, advocating conversation and leading to deep, honest, open, participatory encounter.

The image that is used is Pamela Mitchell-Legg's table framework—a concept encountered by the author in lectures at the Presbyterian School of



Christian Education in Richmond, Virginia—which is extended into the Asian experience of ‘meal-table’ sharing (e.g. the Bap-sang community of Min-jung in Korea) and developed as a powerful model for interreligious dialogue. The invitation to the ‘table community’ becomes the new context for breaking down the walls of culture, race and religion. Yet this is no cosy, cop-out metaphor. Issues of power and oppression are not avoided, as this faith engages with the current realities.

As a church educator in the context of Aotearoa New Zealand, I am greatly helped by Hope Antone’s analysis of context, with the biblical and theological undergirding that she offers. The idea that context shapes education theory and practice is dealt with in such a way that the reader is offered liberative tools to work at the hard issues that limit the possibility of fullness of life for all, and this book inspires me to want to do that more effectively. I look forward to working with others on the questions that are posed at the end of each chapter.

The book is greatly enriched by Hope Antone’s extensive ecumenical experience and her personal networking across the countries of Asia. She writes with a deep awareness of the region and its people: ‘Knowing one’s context also means knowing the people’s dreams and aspirations for life.’ (p. 110). Throughout the work there is a mix of careful academic work with a lively groundedness in ordinary life, as a wide range of scholarly references are peppered with folk tales, conversations and the delightful chapter beginnings (including material from her children Cheekit and Meihsi).

To do Christian education properly is to be radically critical. This book ends with an exploration of compassion, companionship, communion and community as the interrelated elements of an ecumenical or pluralist religious education, leaving readers with a vision of transformation and inspiration for the task we all share.

(Rev. Jennifer Dawson is a president of CCA and ministry educator for the Anglican Diocese of Christchurch in Aotearoa New Zealand.)

Leadership Capacity Building

CCA-FMU conducted leadership capacity building programs in Timor Leste (Timor Lorosa’e) and Myanmar in January and March respectively. For the youngest nation, the theme of the program was ‘Affirming Fullness of Life for All in Timor Leste’ while for Myanmar it was ‘Affirming Fullness of Life and Dignity of Children in Myanmar’.

Timor Leste

In response to the need of Igreja Protestante Timor Leste (IPTL) and churches in Timor, CCA-FMU (URM), in cooperation with IPTL, conducted a four-day leadership training for forty-two participants coming from different churches, including the Pentecostal Church, the Assembly of God and the Bethel Church.

Participants shared their expectations and identified social issues in the community and the problems of churches. These include reconciliation and impunity, refugees, ex-militia, grassroots theological education for local leaders, relations with the Catholic church, the role of women, and economic development and the impact of globalisation, e.g. tourism.

Conducting the training in Bahasa Indonesia, Josef Widyatmadja, CCA Joint Executive Secretary, introduced new way of being church and doing mission and diaconia, community organising, spirituality and servanthood leadership.

Rev. Rob Vrijlenburg (Uniting Church in the Netherlands) spoke on children in the church.

Myanmar

In Myanmar, the focus of the program was empowering people at the grassroots for building their community and church leaders for mission. Participants included eighteen men and twelve women. Josef Widyatmadja gave inputs on social and children’s realities in Asia and a theological reflection. Asoka Weersinghe from Sri Lanka shared his experiences on children’s issues and the peace process in Sri Lanka.

Ecumenical Team Visit to Cambodia and Vietnam for Theological Education

An ecumenical team visit was made to Indochina in February to express solidarity and encourage theological education in Cambodia and Vietnam. The team included Lothar Engel, Sientje Merentek-Abram and Wati Longchar.

The team was delighted to see signs of hope in spite of many hardships and difficulties in Cambodia.

Besides financial needs, there is a great need for developing Cambodian leadership, relevant theology, theological literature, ecumenical cooperation and strengthening the theological education by extension program in the country. TEE, a method of training used for several decades by many denominations in various parts of the world, has produced many church leaders and sustained the churches in Cambodia during its difficult time.

It has proved to be a method of training that is ideal for pastors who have very limited financial resources.

After a visit to Vietnam, the team recommended the following to ecumenical partners and churches for both Cambodia and Vietnam:

- innovative, inexpensive and contextual theological programs,
- more cooperation instead of duplication of theological institutions,
- easy-to-handle theological literature,
- initial efforts to build up library holdings,
- writing the hard lesson and wisdom learnt from TEE programs, including equipping leadership at congregational levels,
- building up theological educators for both residential and TEE programs,
- talent-scouting suitable theological educators for academic upgrading.

Learning from Women's Ministry in Taiwan

The Hong Kong Christian Council and the Hong Kong Women Christian Council coorganised an ecumenical visit in February to the church ministry for women of the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan.

Thirteen women, including staff of HKCC and HKWCC, participated in the visit. They represented different denominations and Christian organisations, including the Anglican Church, the Church of Christ in China, the Salvation Army, the Tsun Tsing Church, the Hong Kong Baptist Church, the Young Women's Christian Association, and the Justice and Peace Commission of the Hong Kong Catholic Diocese.

Working as pastors, staff in Christian organisations, or church lay leaders, all the participants were interested in women's ministry and committed to seek new alternatives of ministering with women.

Generally speaking, it was a tight and ambitious exposure. Participants found the schedule challenging, but also tiring. The visit had three parts: church ministry for women, direct services for vulnerable women's groups, and a feminine spirituality workshop.



Hong Kong women in an ecumenical visit to Taiwan

For the church ministry for women, the group visited PCT and the Sprout Group of the Catholic Church. Apart from sharing the rationale and understanding of their ministry, participants also had an exposure to the regional and local work of the women's ministry of PCT. This gave all a broad understanding of the women's work, where ongoing leadership training for laywomen from the central to regional level is held every year. The Sprout Group situates itself

clearly in theology, the church, and women's movements in the secular world. The Sprout Group keeps close contact and arranges ongoing dialogue with the Catholic Church and other Catholic groups.

The visits to groups providing direct services for vulnerable women included the Garden of Hope Foundation, the Taiwan Women's Development Association, the Homemakers' Union and Foundation, and ECPAT-Taiwan. These groups try to address the needs of marginalised women, e.g. domestic workers, adolescent sex workers, women involved in trafficking, victims of domestic violence, single mothers and women in poverty. These vulnerable women can be met in churches in Hong Kong, but many ministers are somehow unable to support them. The women pastors in the group are convinced that churches should develop a deeper understanding of the situation of marginalised women and explore a women-friendly ministry in churches.

Finally the group had a two-day retreat run by the Sprout Group. This experiential workshop helped participants search for feminine spirituality.

It was a good opportunity for all to care for their inner selves and to explore their emotions deeply in order to provide a place for communion with God. The retreat also



helped to build mutual understanding and sister bonding among the participants needed in developing an innovative ministry for women in Hong Kong.

After the exposure trip, the participants had a reunion meeting and planned future actions.

One plan is to share the experience with churches using every opportunity. HKWCC will publish documentation about the visit in the bulletin, *Liberation*.

A working group concerning ministry for women will be set up involving some of the participants. It aims at exploring alternative models of ministry for the advancement of men-women partnership in Hong Kong churches. After the local discussions have taken place, a seminar on alternative ministry for women will be held at the end of 2003.

—Christina Wong Wai Yin, Hong Kong Women Christian Council

People

India

The Rev. Dr **P. Mohan Larbeer** was installed as principal of Tamilnadu Theological Seminary in India on 13 April after having been unanimously elected to the post by the Governing Council of TTS last August. He succeeds Rev. Dr Dhyanchand Carr, who has retired from the post.

Indonesia

The Gereja Masehi Injili Sangehe-Talaud or Christian Evangelical Church in Sangehe-Talaud wishes to announce its synod officers until 2006: Rev. **Boulevard Abram** (chair), Rev. **A. Makasar** (vice chair I), Rev. **W. Kansil** (vice chair II), Rev. **J. Dalughu** (vice chair III), Rev. **W. Salindeho** (general secretary), Rev. **C. A. Turangan Rakinaung** (vice secretary), Rev. **B. Salindeho** (treasurer) and Mrs **Wolff Mukmin** (vice-treasurer).

Taiwan

The National Council of Churches of Taiwan has elected a new moderator: Rev. **Chang Fu Min** of the Taiwan Lutheran Church.

NCCJ Has New General Secretary

The Rev. Toshimasa Yamamoto was unanimously elected the General Secretary of the National Christian Council in Japan at the 35th General Assembly of NCCJ held in Tokyo. He assumed the three-year post on 1 April.

Toshi, as he is known to friends, has served at NCCJ as Executive Secretary for International Relations for the past ten years. Prior to coming to NCCJ he was a local pastor of the United Methodist Church in Honolulu, Hawaii.

Asked by *CCA News* what he thought were the major challenges in his new position at this time he said, 'In light of our GA theme, "Towards Peace and Reconciliation—Overcoming All Violence", I see peace and justice-making ministry as our priority.

'As the culture of war and violence is spreading, upholding peace and justice is one of our major challenges. It is also important for NCCJ to continue to work on protecting human dignity and working for the marginalised sections of society.'



Rev. Toshimasa Yamamoto

Toshi succeeded the Rev. **Kenichi Otsu**, who stepped down after nine years of service to take up a new appointment as director of the Tokyo Centre of the Nippon Christian Academy.

Re-elected to serve NCCJ were Rev. **Reiko Suzuki** and Rev. **Renta Nishihara** as moderator and vice-moderator, respectively. Rev. **Han Song Hyon** of the Korean Christian Church in Japan was elected the other vice-moderator. Rev. **Masayuki Hiraoka** of the Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church and Rev. **Koto Masuda** of the United Church of Christ in Japan were chosen as secretaries.

A panel discussion was held on the theme 'Japan viewed from Asia—the hopes placed on NCCJ', chaired by former NCCJ vice moderator Kanou Yoshitaka. Dr Ahn Jae Woong (CCA general secretary) and Rev. Paik Do-Woong (general secretary of the National Council of Churches in Korea) gave presentations.

Ahn called on Japan to let go of its dependence on the West in favour of increased dialogue with its Asian neighbours. He expressed hope that NCCJ will continue to build on the reputation, trust, authority and morality it has already achieved within Asia, dialogue with and assist churches in other Asian countries, and become a central player in the worldwide ecumenical movement.

Paik spoke of the importance of solidarity between Japan, Korea and Taiwan, and called for the nurturing of future ecumenical leaders and for strengthened inter-religious dialogue within Japan and Korea. In response, Ms Suzuki called for a reappraisal of history by the Japanese people, as many have not repented of their country's actions. Although many people welcome the fact that different religions are united in the quest for peace, the current climate of hostility toward North Korea makes it difficult for people to envisage that repentance is necessary.

A Buddhist from the group Nihonzan Myohoji, who was an observer at the assembly, said that he was moved by the activities of Christians toward creating peace, and expressed his intention to work alongside them in heartfelt action.

Drought Relief in Sri Lanka

In May the National Council of Churches in Sri Lanka (NCCSL) was faced with massive requests for help following the worst floods in the country for fifty years.

Led by General Secretary Ebenezer Joseph, NCCSL helped families in the worst-hit Ratnapura and surrounding area, and provided relief through dry rations of rice, dhal, sugar, tea, flour and milk powder, and soap, clothing, temporary toilets and temporary shelter. Immediate needs of the people include access to clean drinking water, food and bedding.

The floods began on 17 May, killing more than 300 people and displacing and rendering homeless tens of thousands who fled to highland villages and took shelter in churches, schools, temples and mosques.

PROK Jubilee Celebration

The Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea (PROK) has lined up various activities to celebrate their jubilee throughout the year. On 10 February, PROK leadership and local church members, moderators and executive officers of the twenty-four presbyteries launched the jubilee in a special worship service in Cheju. In view of the present situation of denominational divisiveness in Korea, a powerful expression of the journey towards unity was symbolised by the participation of the Presbyterian Church of Korea (PCK). The holy communion was co-celebrated by the PROK moderator and PCK vice-moderator. The service was also held in the Songnae Church of the Cheju Presbytery of PROK.

Historically, Songnae Church became divided into Songnae Church of PROK and Songan Church of PCK, resulting from differing theological and mission stances that divided the Presbyterian Church in 1953. Such conflict has kept the PROK and PCK apart over the past fifty years.

'When the two ministers and the elders of Songan and Songnae churches, together with presbytery and national leaders of both denominations stood side-by-side in one circle of hand-clasping unity and fellowship, we raised our hearts in thanksgiving and new promise to the God of healing and peace,' wrote Rev. Heawon Chae, executive secretary for Ecumenical Relations of the PROK.

The PROK Jubilee Proclamation has the following seven declarations:

- Restoring earth's destroyed nature to the order of God's creation, we will work for justice and peace so that the earth may become a true community of life.
- We will transform a culture of materialism and violence into a culture of life.
- We will work for reconciliation and peaceful reunification of our divided people.
- Confessing the need to move from churches separated by division 'Toward One Church', we will make every effort to realise unity.
- We will renew the church, that it may become the whole and perfect body of Christ.
- We will build equality between men and women and harmony between generations.
- We will share and serve in a spirit of love for our neighbours.

From the 10 February launching until the main celebration on 9–10 June, PROK is holding a 120-day Jubilee Prayer Relay among the 120 districts of the twenty-four PROK presbyteries. Two jubilee candles lit at the jubilee launching are being relayed from one district to another.

An academic symposium was held on 19 May on the theme, 'Reflecting on the past and looking to our vision for the future'.

A homecoming consultation for PROK mission coworkers from around the world was held on 19 May, aimed at continuing education on mission orientation, and reflection on the theme, 'PROK and Jubilee, Together with the World'.

The Jubilee Forum set for 9 June in Seoul is an ecumenical dialogue beyond denominational and faith barriers that will include different Protestant denominations and the

Catholic Church. With the theme, 'Toward One Church', the forum will be a time to grapple with the churches' reality of division and the impact it has on the churches' role as light and salt in Korean history and society.

An all-day celebration, PROK New History Jubilee Celebration, is set for 10 June in Chonan City.

With a focus on the PROK 87th General Assembly theme, 'United as One in the Promised New Land', the celebration will include a marketplace of exhibitions of church history and life, worship, cultural performances, prayer and singing.

Onward to Peace in India and Pakistan

As the Indian government announced in early May that it was appointing an ambassador to restore to full strength its mission in Pakistan, leaders of the National Councils of Churches in India and Pakistan expressed hopes for a more lasting peace between their countries.

In response, Pakistan announced plans to release 300 Indian fishermen, imprisoned after straying into Pakistani waters. The governments of the two countries prepared to resume road, rail and air traffic communications, which had previously been cut.

Victor Azariah, general secretary of the National Council of Churches of Pakistan, said people are craving for peace, hence, even 'ordinary people are very excited about the latest developments'.

President of the National Council of Churches in India, Geevarghese Mar Coorilos, shared the same hope and said that increased openness between the two countries will produce peace.

The strained relations between India and Pakistan are rooted in a decades-long dispute over the territory of Kashmir in the Himalaya region. Both countries lay claim to Kashmir, which has been divided between them since 1949.

Forum for Theological Librarians

Wati Longchar facilitated the consultation of the Forum for Association of Theological Librarians (ForATL) in Bangkok on 16–22 February. With the help of ETE support, sixteen theological librarians were brought together in Chiang Mai to discuss training programs, resources sharing, networking, publication and so on. Wati spoke on 'The Role of Librarian in Ecumenical Leadership Formation'. The forum decided to focus on archivist training program during the next two years and an archivist training will be organised with the help of the Scholarship Department of WCC during this year.

Leadership Program for Indochina

In order to equip second-line leaders for Indochina with tools and values of ecumenical leadership, CCA conducts an annual training program for representatives from churches in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia.

The program is also a venue for Indochina church leaders to strengthen their relationships, learn with and from each other, and be updated in tools and knowledge of community development and social concerns.

This year the leadership program included participants from Myanmar and, for the first time, three representatives from the General Evangelical Church of North Vietnam were able to attend the program.

Program topics included Bible studies, history of the ecumenical movement, management development, personal development and partnership in leadership for transformation. Resource persons were Dr Prawate Khid-arn, Ms Cora Tabing-Reyes, Rev. Dr Tso Man King, Mr Tony Waworuntu and Dr Gert Ruppel.

CCA Staff Member Receives Award



Daniel Thiagarajah, Cherepanin V. Oleg, Ahn Jae Woong and David Gill at the presentation.



Daniel Thiagarajah

Daniel Thiagarajah, then joint executive secretary of CCA Faith, Mission and Unity, was awarded the Order of the Russian Orthodox Church of St Grand Duke Vladimir III-degree on 18 March in Hong Kong by His Holiness the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia Alexy II.

A token of 'sincere respect and recognition of his work'—through missionary activity, sermon of the Word of God, and the organisation of help to the needy people—the award was presented by Fr V. Oleg, representative of the Russian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) in the Kingdom of Thailand. As of 30 April, Daniel resigned from his CCA post in order to become the parish priest of his church in Colombo, Sri Lanka.

CCA Meetings in Indonesia

The Christian Conference of Asia has lined up several meetings this June in Indonesia.

The meeting of the Joint Program Area Committees (JPAC) will be held in the Hotel Puncak Raya in Cipayung, Indonesia, on 21–26 June.

The JPAC committees were elected at the Tomohon Assembly in 2000 to help

strengthen the work of the program clusters in the CCA: General Secretariat; Faith, Mission and Unity; Justice, International Affairs, Development and Service; and Ecumenical Formation, Gender Justice and Youth Empowerment.

This will be the second meeting of JPAC to evaluate the programs of CCA since the Tomohon Assembly and plan for the next couple of years until the Assembly in 2005.

Sunday, 22 June, will be a time of worship with local congregations. Daily Bible studies will be led by members of JPAC, rep-

representing the different clusters: Rev. Dr Albert Walters (Malaysia), Ms Amie Dural and Mr Leslie Capus (Philippines) and Rev. Toshimasa Yamamoto (Japan). Other small meetings will be held prior to the JPAC meeting. These include the CCA-FABC (Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences) Relations Committee meeting on 15–18 June, the CCA-WCC (World Council of Churches) Liaison Group meeting on 17 June, the CCA Personnel Committee meeting on 19–20 June, the Officers' Meeting on 20 June and the Executive Committee meeting. These small group meetings will be held at the PGI Guest House in Jakarta.

The meetings are hosted by the Communion of Churches in Indonesia (PGI), headed by Rev. Dr Izak Lambe (general secretary) and the Gereja Protestan di Indonesia bagian Barat (GPIB), headed by the Rev. R.A. Waney (chairperson).

Asia Ecumenical Academy Program Moves to Bangkok

The Asia Ecumenical Academy, a three-week ecumenical formation program, will be launched this year in Bangkok, Thailand.

The venue has changed from Hong Kong, but the dates remain at 3–23 August 2003.

AEA is an in-depth study program to enhance the theoretical and theological resources of ecumenical leaders for their participation in the shaping of the ecumenical movement.

The program director is Dr Preman Niles, former general secretary of the Council for World Mission and now visiting professor at Chung Chi College of Theology at the Chinese University of Hong Kong.

Resource persons are Dr Ninan Koshy (from India, former director of International Affairs, WCC), Dr Rose Wu (director of the Hong Kong Christian Institute), Dr Patricia Martinez (senior research fellow, Asia-Europe Institute of the University of Malaya in Malaysia), Dr Archie Lee (professor at the Chinese University of Hong Kong), and Rev. David Gill (administrative

pastor of Kowloon Union Church in Hong Kong). AEA hopes to sharpen ecumenical leaders' grasp of contemporary and emerging ecumenical issues, and deepen their ecumenical engagements on peace issues, interfaith relations and cooperation.

AEA is administered by the Christian Conference of Asia's program area on Ecumenical Formation, Gender Justice and Youth Empowerment.

Faith and Love in Action

When the early church suffered persecution it scattered and spread the gospel to the whole world. SARS is not a persecution, but it has prevented Christians from gathering together. Still, SARS presents an opportunity for gospel ministry.

Without dividing into our separate denominational identities, we Christians can pray for Taiwan, not forgetting at the same time to spread the good news, pray for power, and be encouraged by God's mighty hand.' Thus said the Rev. Dr C.M. Kao, former General Secretary of the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan, and a member of the organising committee of the annual national prayer breakfast.

In view of the SARS situation in Taiwan, the annual national prayer breakfast, originally scheduled for 14 June, has been modified into a national fasting and prayer meeting. While the original theme for the breakfast was 'Repentance and Renewal', focusing on ethnic identity and calling together representatives of Taiwan's many aboriginal and immigrant groups for reconciliation in the love of Christ, it will be supplemented with prayers regarding the SARS situation.

In Taiwan, churches are responding to the severe acute respiratory syndrome epidemic in various ways.

One church, Hsin-ai (Faith and Love) Presbyterian Church, located near the SARS quarantined Hwa Chang Public Housing Estate in Taipei City, opened its doors to serve the military forces working to decontaminate the neighbourhood. The church

has offered its facilities as a 'rest station' where food and drink are made available. Staffing for the program is provided by the congregation itself and by the Christian Rescue Association.

In response to the spread of SARS, and specifically to the quarantine of patients, staff and visitors to Ho-ping Hospital, groups from several different religions have come out to demonstrate on the sidewalks around the hospital. They gather under the theme of 'Send away SARS, Bring in Peace'. (*Ho-ping* translated into English means 'peace'.)

—summarised from
Taiwan Church News

Meeting with Indonesians in Australia

Josef Widyatmadja delivered lectures and a sermon to the Apple Cross congregation (Indonesia Christian Church) and Indonesian Mission Institute in Australia on 5–14 April. During the five-day meeting Josef shared on new way of doing mission in a changing world, understanding of—the ecumenical program and URM work, spirituality, leadership for the future, racism and economic justice.

Greetings to all the churches that are celebrating **Asia Sunday** this month of June. Here's who we've heard about so far:

1 June: Kowloon Union Church, Hong Kong (Rev. David Gill);
Uniting Church, Adelaide, Australia (Esmond Dowdy);
Church of Bangladesh (Bishop Barnabas Dwijen Mondal)
Presbyterian Church in Taiwan

2 June: World Council of Churches

8 June: Hong Kong Christian Council

Please let us know of your celebration.

No Peace without Justice

Following the US-led war against Iraq, churches continue to issue statements calling for peace with justice

Aotearoa New Zealand

In Aotearoa New Zealand, heads of churches issued a call for an interim United Nations administration in Iraq. In their statement, church leaders declared that 'claims of victory by those who initiated this unjust war bestow no rights in determining the future of Iraq'. Here is their statement in full:

Before the invasion of Iraq began, we, church leaders in New Zealand, although keenly aware of the evil intentions and capacities of President Saddam Hussein's government, spoke out against such an attack. Now it seems the war is reaching its conclusion with victory by the United States-led forces.

We express our deep grief over the destruction of human life and property that has been brought about by this war, especially the death and disabling of so many innocent men, women and children, along with military personnel. We state again our conviction that the launching of this war lacked moral and legal legitimacy. It was launched before all peace efforts and other means to avoid it had been taken.

Now, as the world turns its attention to the reconstruction of Iraq, we state unequivocally that peace must include justice; there will be no lasting peace without justice.

In the situation that has been created in Iraq, we believe two principles of justice must be observed:

- That claims of victory by those who initiated this unjust war bestow no rights in determining the future of Iraq.
- That the land, resources, governance and future of Iraq belong to the people of Iraq.

Therefore:

- we support the New Zealand government in calling for an interim United Nations

administration in Iraq, with authority to oversee the rebuilding of the infrastructure of the country and the return of government to the people of Iraq. We are strongly opposed to the United States and its allies in this war assuming any prior rights in this process,

- we will encourage and support initiatives of the New Zealand government (a) to share in any necessary peacekeeping operations during the United Nations interim administration and (b) to contribute to the restoration of health and education for the people of Iraq,
- we urge the New Zealand government to do all it can to ensure that, if charges of war crimes or crimes against humanity are to be laid, the United Nations take sole responsibility for the laying of such charges and that such charges be heard and determined by an independent international court, such as the World Court,
- we commit ourselves to continue the aid and development projects being undertaken by the churches. There is much already being done, and we commit ourselves to the rebuilding of relationships between Christians and Muslims.

We state again: there will be peace only when there is justice!

We invite the members of our churches and all people of goodwill in this country to join us in promoting peace with justice for the people of Iraq and the Middle East.

Korea

In Korea, the Christian Solidarity for Peace, a group of ecumenical leaders, Christian intellectuals and peace activists, expressed deep concerns about the war against Iraq and the crisis on the Korean peninsula.

In a statement, the group urged that 'North Korea clearly state its intent to immediately stop its nuclear weapons devel-

opment program, and to participate in peace settlement in Korea and Northeast Asia'. The group called for the implementation of the Basic Agreement on a nuclear-free Korea signed in December 1991 by the governments of the two sides of Korea.

The group also called on the United States to make concrete responses to North Korea in guaranteeing the regime and life of its people, in return for North Korea's renunciation of its nuclear weapons programs.

'We cannot support any policies leading to armed conflict and, potentially, war in Korea. We cannot accept the US administration's branding of North Korea as part of an 'axis of evil' or an 'outlaw nation'. We cannot agree with the US policy of preemptive nuclear strikes, because such a policy can lead to war on the Korean peninsula,' the statement said.

The group expressed support for a way of solving the Korean nuclear crisis through diplomatic efforts and dialogue. They urged the US government to negotiate with North Korea on issues of the very existence of its people, guarantee of its regime, and a non-aggression pact.

The group also urged the South Korean government to help eliminate the threat of war and pave the way for a peaceful settlement by dismantling Cold War structures, enhancing the ongoing South-North peaceful coexistence, and by adopting a multilateral framework of dialogue and cooperation not only within Korea but also with the surrounding nations.

Finally, the group asked other churches around the world to work together to plant peace in the world and on the Korean peninsula.

'We firmly believe that we can achieve a new vision of church unity by participating in peace without war and without nuclear weapons, beyond the barriers of theological doctrines and historical and cultural differences,' they stated.

A Prayer of Confession

We confess complicity and indifference ...
We do not allow the suffering of others to disturb our comfort
We forget our countries' history and deny responsibility.

Kyrie, kyrie, eleison. Kyrie, kyrie, eleison.

We confess our ignorance ...
We have shut out the voices of those whose experiences are different from ours
We rely too much on the media to tell us what to think
We know only our own reality.

Kyrie, kyrie, eleison. Kyrie, kyrie, eleison.

We confess our evasion and silence ...
We allow our fear to control us
We have allowed evil to go unchecked
We try to confront the world's evils without ever confronting our own heart.

Kyrie, kyrie, eleison. Kyrie, kyrie, eleison.

Forgive us, O Lord, and help us to follow the path of peace in our selves and for our world.

—*Claudia Genung-Yamamoto*

